

Schakowsky Bill Targets Cars' Power Windows

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BY SHAMUS TOOMEY Staff Reporter - Chicago Sun-Times

Power windows that automatically reverse when striking an obstruction on the way up would be mandated on new cars with power windows under a bill introduced in Congress this week aiming to protect children.

Representatives Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.) and Peter King (R-N.Y.) introduced the proposal, which also requires child-safe power window buttons and rear-collision warning systems to avoid backing over children and objects.

The power window protections would be required within a year of the bill becoming law. The rear-collision warning systems would be phased in, Schakowsky said.

"If logic prevails -- because the cost to implement these safety changes is negligible and the technology is already there -- we should be able to move this legislation along," she said. "This is a pretty easy fix yet can solve a life-threatening problem."

The bill follows reports in the Sun-Times and elsewhere of children accidentally killed by power windows.

Safety advocates have warned of the dangers of power windows since the late 1960s. The windows have been blamed for at least 28 deaths since 1990, most of them children ages 3 and

younger. Hundreds more are injured each year, including kids who have lost fingers or suffered crushed wrists or hands, according to the Kansas-based Kids and Cars advocacy group.

A key danger comes when young children lean out of a car window and accidentally push the power window button down. Some cars are now equipped with buttons that must be pulled up to raise the window. The bill would require those buttons on all new cars.

Carmakers have said they are already moving to safer, push-up style buttons. But General Motors officials have said they must balance the safety issues surrounding auto-reverse windows with the need to quickly roll up a window if an intruder sticks an arm in.

In addition to the new proposed standards, the Schakowsky-King bill asks federal transportation officials to study the issues and report back to Congress, and to start a national database that documents power window accidents.

The sponsors hope to pick up more co-sponsors when Congress reconvenes in January. The bill was sent to the House Energy and Commerce committee.